

Children, Youth & Family Consortium

CYFC Monthly

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Maternal Mental Health: Why We Need to Pay Attention

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Maternal mental health during pregnancy, childbirth, and infancy is an important predictor of child development, yet it is massively understudied, underreported, and undertreated. Across the world, mental illness associated with pregnancy and childbirth is a primary complication for women. Depression is the most common mental illness among soon-to-be mothers and new mothers, with over 10 percent of pregnant women and over 13 percent of women who just gave birth experiencing depression (see this World Health Organization site for more information). Other conditions affecting the health of both mother and child include anxiety disorders, eating disorders, and psychotic disorders.

Only recently have many public health organizations and the medical community as a whole started to recognize that perinatal maternal mental illness and mental health can have an effect on both mother and fetus. Thanks to the efforts of many public health organizations, there is increasing recognition of the widespread nature and effects of postpartum depression. Organizations like [Maternal Mental Health Now](#), the [Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs](#), and the [Maternal Health Task Force](#) all work to raise awareness about maternal health and mental health, and often focus on the effects of postpartum depression, such as chronic mental illness, struggles with parent-child bonding, and emotional, developmental, and cognitive delays in infants and children. Perinatal mental illness — especially depression — [has been linked to](#) low birth weight, preterm delivery, and also postpartum mental illness and suicide. To learn more about the effects of perinatal and postpartum mental illness, please visit any of the sites linked above.

Barriers Remain

In the majority of countries, many real and perceived barriers remain for pregnant women or new mothers in need of services. Research has shown that many women do not actively seek help for perinatal or postpartum depression because they do not know where to go or because assistance is not available to them ([Dennis & Chung-Lee, 2006](#); [Goodman, 2009](#)). Furthermore, cultural stigmas around mental illness prevent many women from getting treatment for depression or other psychological disorders, along with fear that disclosing mental illness will lead to having their children taken away.

Women also shy away from seeking perinatal, including antenatal, mental health treatment due to minimization of their feelings by health care professionals or because of fear of medication. Pregnant women or women who are breastfeeding might discontinue medications or refuse prescribed medications because of concern about possible effects of those medications on their child, which can often lead to decreased mental health. The stark lack of research related to psychiatric medications for pregnant or breastfeeding women and their children leave women unsure and unwilling to seek help.

More Research Needed

More time and research must be devoted to mental health during and after pregnancy in order to fully understand its impact on mother and child — sometimes for many years to come. As public health organizations and community advocates work to reduce the stigma and increase knowledge, and as more treatment options become available, we can move into a future where access to mental health support is abundant, and seeking care is easy and commonplace for pregnant women and new mothers.

For More Information

See these resources to learn more:

[Thinking Healthy: A manual for psychological management of perinatal depression](#)

A resource for community health workers to help reduce prenatal depression.

[Postpartum Support International](#)

Connects mothers, family members, and professionals with a network of support; also includes various tools to help with postpartum mental health.

[Minnesota Department of Health: Maternal Wellbeing Innovation Lab](#)

A Minnesota-based project to improve access to mental health resources for new mothers.

[Postnatal Depression: A Survival Guide for Dads](#)

Learn how postnatal depression affects fathers and what to do about it.

References

Dennis, C., & Chung-Lee, L. (2006). Postpartum depression help-seeking barriers and maternal treatment preferences: A qualitative systematic review. *Birth Issues in Perinatal Care*, 33(4), 323-331.

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69. <http://www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1523-536X.2008.00296.x/full>

Consortium News

Evaluation Completed of the Bruce Vento Elementary School Partnership

The University of Minnesota Extension Center for Family Development evaluation team has gathered information from teachers, school staff, and parents on the impact of the Bruce Vento Elementary School collaboration. Read about the process and outcomes of this evaluation on the [Healthy Bodies. Healthy Minds. Healthy Learners blog](#).

Check Out Resources and Research on Trans Youth

The 2016-2017 CYFC Scholar in Residence Program is focused on trans youth and their needs, strengths, health, and family and community connections. As part of this work, Derek Mahan, a graduate research assistant with the program, has compiled a list of local resources and related research on trans youth. Watch for announcements about upcoming events and research publications regarding trans youth in future issues of *CYFC Monthly*.

Organizations

Bridge for Youth. At this organization, experienced counselors work with youth and parents to help them handle challenging situations, reconnect as a family, or transition to an alternative living option. Bridge for Youth also offers supports groups for LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) teens and their families. To learn more about Bridge for Youth's mission, attend a tour day at its Minneapolis location and meet Executive Director Michelle Basham.

Reclaim. This organization aims to increase access to mental and integrative health support so that queer and trans youth may reclaim their lives from oppression in all its forms. To learn more about Reclaim's services and mission and gain more insight on transgender and gender nonconforming work, attend an upcoming Reclaim community potluck dinner on August 25 or September 29. Dinners are held from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Reclaim office, 771 Raymond Ave., St. Paul, MN 55114.

OutFront Minnesota. This group's mission is to create a state where LGBTQ people are free to be who they are, love who they love, and live without fear of violence, harassment or discrimination. To learn more about being an ally for the transgender community, attend Trans* Folks, Friends, & Allies group meetings for people of all genders, organized by OutFront Minnesota's Anti-Violence Program. The meetings provide a safe space to gather, network, share resources and experiences, discuss local and national events in trans activist communities, and celebrate gender identities and expressions. Meetings are held the third Thursday of each month from 6 to 8 p.m. at Cafe Southside, 3405 Chicago Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55407.

Center for Family Development Announcements

Partnership with Pediatric Clinics Supports Food Security

Cecilia Di Caprio, a University of Minnesota Extension SNAP-Ed educator, is teaching nutrition classes to low-income families at Hennepin County Medical Center as part of a larger effort to better serve Minnesota children and their families experiencing food insecurity. The partnership seeks to support policy, system, and environmental changes in food insecurity identification and referrals at the clinics so that the changes are sustainable. Read more on the [Family Matters blog](#).

Blog Post Explores Reducing Food Waste

[Mary Schroeder](#), University of Minnesota Extension educator, writes about food waste, its impact on the environment, and how you can save money by avoiding it. She outlines ideas for grocery shopping and cooking to reduce waste. Read more on the [Live Healthy. Live Well blog](#).

University & Community Announcements

Conference to Focus on Building Resilience for Trauma Recovery

Sponsor: George Family Foundation

Date: September 27, 2016

Cost: \$55

Location: St. Paul, MN

At the Building Resilience conference, you will learn about healing individual and community trauma through integrative health practices outlined in peer-reviewed literature. Presenters include spiritual and cultural healing practitioners, as well as breathwork specialists. [Learn more on the conference registration page](#).

New Breastfeeding Fact Sheet Available

Sponsor: University of Minnesota School of Public Health, Center for Leadership Education in Maternal & Child Public Health (MCH)

The Why Breastfeed? fact sheet was recently released as part of National Breastfeeding Awareness Month in August. The fact sheet offers useful information on the benefits of breastfeeding to both baby and mother, such as decreased risk of common ailments and chronic conditions later in life. Access the [fact sheet](#) on the MCH website.

Moms' Mental Health Matters Website Unveiled

Sponsor: Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

The new Moms' Mental Health Matters website provides information for pregnant and postpartum mothers, their families, and health care providers on depression and anxiety that can occur during pregnancy and after a baby is born. Resources focus on risk factors, symptoms, and how to get help. Access the [Moms' Mental Health Matters website](#).

Dr. Bruce Perry to Present on Neurodevelopmental Approach to Child Maltreatment

Sponsor: Minnesota Association For Children's Mental Health

Date: October 18, 2016

Cost: \$199-209

Credits: 6 continuing education hours

Location: Burnsville, MN

Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D. will lead participants in a workshop addressing neurodevelopment, clinical and research findings on the impact of trauma and neglect on maltreated children's brain development, and the implications of using a neurodevelopmental approach to clinical treatment of maltreated children. Dr. Perry will discuss the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics for treating maltreated children. Learn more and register on the [MACMH website](#).

Job Opportunities

[Headway Emotional Health Services — Multiple Openings](#)

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